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Some aspects of organizational theory often ignored by the evaluation literature are examined. The evaluator must utilize a knowledge of organizations to examine his/her position as an evaluator, and implement that role definition. There are dangers in defining the evaluator's role as that of technician: it is more beneficial for the evaluator to utilize critical intelligence and define his or her role as scholar-technician. Most important is the problem of the evaluator's effectiveness and value to the organization and its evaluation process. One way to increase effectiveness is to broaden the definition of the evaluator's role and to gain an enhanced understanding of the organization. (Author/GK)

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Applying Organizational Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Evaluators and Policy Decisions:
Applying Organizational Knowledge

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As evaluators, we are called upon to help in decision-making and in improving program management. Yet we often lament that we are unable to have impact on policy decisions made by our clients. This paper discusses the value of applying our knowledge of organizational functioning as we look at and perform our evaluation role.

Organizations exist to survive, and as the questioners of organizational effectiveness, evaluators challenge that survival need. Organizational communications are accepted as authoritative when understood to be congruent with organizational and personal purposes, and evaluators' formal reports often are not. Evaluators often measure symbols, organizational goals, rather than behavioral manifestations more understandable to those working within the organizational system. Organizations are complex, open systems, and evaluation input may be transformed into nonmeasurable, though utilized, output.

Drawing on Deutscher's (1976) distinction between evaluator as "technician-employee" and evaluator as "scholar-scientist", this paper discusses constraints tending to define the evaluator as technician-employee. This role definitior hampers attempts to provide meaningful evaluation by its tendencies to make the evaluator reactive rather than participatory in problem definition, management, and reporting, and to make research design and methodology expressive - ends in themselves - rather than instrumental means to an end. It is argued that this narrow

role definition negates the possibility that the evaluator's dimension of the assessment process will deserve as much weight in the decision-making process as he or she would like. It is suggested that the evaluator include the role of scholar-scientist, applying his or her critical intelligence throughout the evaluation process, in order to provide a more meaningful evaluation service to the organization.

The apparent advantage the external evaluator has in defining and maintaining a broad role definition disappears when the internal evaluator is able to effectively utilize organizational knowledge. The internal evaluator is in a position to know the organization's character, and how that affects the program being evaluated, and to be a part of the organization's informal structure, utilizing that knowledge and position to further his or her efforts to provide meaningful and usable evaluation.

Evaluators and Policy Decisions: Applying Organizational Knowledge

If only: program staff clearly defined their goals. If only: evaluators were allowed to design and implement studies with methodological rigor. If only: evaluators' reports, conclusions and recommendations were actually read by those making programmatic decisions. If only all this were to happen, evaluators would have impact on decision-making. Right? But wait - aren't we forgetting our origins? I am a sociologist, many of you are psychologists or economists or social workers. We are quick to claim that our methodological expertise is of value to our organizational setting. We rapidly explain that our knowledge in the substantive area of our human service organization provides a valuable perspective for decision-makers. But what about the knowledge that we have also gained - from sociology, from psychology, from economics - about organizations qua organizations? Do we seek to use that knowledge in our applied settings?

Michael Patton (1978) has done us a favor by bringing organizational theory into his discussion of utilization-focused evaluation. I would like to expand upon an area implicit in his 1978 book: the role and position of the evaluator. Perhaps by viewing ourselves, and our positions, within our organizational settings, we will gain some insight into why our findings are not being utilized to the extent we would like. Perhaps we can begin to grapple with how we can be more valuable within our organizations.

The Position of Evaluators: Are We In Irons?

Stevenson and Longabaugh (1980:465) speak of the "vulnerability" of

the position of internal evaluators. They say:

> As evaluators struggle to gain power and influence within their organizations, they confront a series of value issues and conflicting role demands which make a comfortable identity difficult to achieve.

External evaluators are also troubled by their role definition:

> The evaluation researcher is an outsider, which may be functional in terms of objectivity, but the status of outsider carries no power as far as insuring that evaluative information has any effect on future behavior. (Ostrander, et.al., 1978:192)

Both focus on the evaluator's lack of power to influence the organization, but the issues are even broader.

First, we can go back to basic organizational literature to state, simply, that organizations exist to survive (e.g., Michels, 1966). Evaluators are the questioners, the doubters, of an organization's programs and policies. There is a limit to how far a doubter can be allowed to rise to influence the organization when the prime objective is not effectiveness or even efficiency but rather simple survival of the organization. Organizations have created, within themselves, what Michels terms a "collective will" (1966:61), and it is that collective will that we are calling into question. Etzioni explains our dilemma: "In organizations, enforcing the collectivity norms is likely to be a condition determining the power-holder's access to the means of power." (1961:5)

In preparing a report, we are potentially challenging the viability of the formally-defined structure. While some form of evaluation or quality control is implicit to the organization's long-term survival, "saving face" may require that necessary adjustments take place by utilizing informal means instead:

> Institutionalized organizations protect their formal structures from evaluation on the basis of technical performance: inspection, evaluation, and control of activities are minimized, and coordination, interdependence, and mutual adjustments among structural units are handled informally. (Meyer and Rowan, 1977:357)

Michel's concept of "collective will" is expanded in more recent literature. Burton Clark (1972) discusses the organizational saga - a story the organization tells about itself. In psychological literature (e.g. Drexler, 1977; James and Jones, 1974) the term used is "organizational climate." Selznick (1949:181) describes the "organizational character:"

> Organizations, like individuals, strive for a unified pattern of response. This integration will define in advance the general attitudes of personnel to specific problems as they arise. This means that there will be pressure within the organization, from below as well as from above, for unity in outlook.

The organizational character derived is not always one in which receptivity to scientifically-derived results or willingness to change are dominant values. We may sympathize with Wildavsky's ideal type model of the self-evaluating organization (1978), as we do with Campbell's experimenting society (1971), but realize too that we are living within a world that is otherwise.

Second, in adequately performing our role - and in the process sometimes reporting unwanted results - we will have problems in having a communication accepted as authoritative. Most businesspersons can quote to you from Chester Barnard's 1938 classic:

> A person can and will accept a communication as authoritative only when four conditions simultaneously obtain: (a) he can and does understand the communication; (b) <u>at the time of his decision</u> he believes that it is not inconsistent with the purpose of the organization; (c) <u>at the time of his decision</u>, he believes it to be compatible with his personal interest as a whole; and (d) he is able mentally and physically to comply with it.

I think evaluators have been told often enough that findings must be presented in terms understandable to the intelligent layperson. In the words of S.J. Perelman, "There is nothing like a good painstaking survey full of decimal points and guarded generalizations to put a glaze like a Sung vase on your eyeball." The second condition, that the communication not be inconsistent with that person's perception of organizational purposes, may be violated when negative findings are reported. Certainly one organizational purpose was to have a workable, effective program, and we may be telling them otherwise. Or, in process evaluation, some trends we are projecting on the basis of current data may not be compatible with organizational survival or growth. The conclusions based on the data may not be considered authoritative; often our methodology, or research design, or "clean" data are questioned. The third condition, compatibility with personal interests, is also an issue: program staff are generally seen as reformers, who believe in the program underway. Suggestions to terminate or modify that program may not be greeted by them with open arms. The last criterion, that the person be able to mentally and physically comply with the communication, bears on the compatibility of our recommendations to such realities as budgets, resources, and capabilities. As Richard Hall explains, "uncontrollable contingencies and internally and externally imposed mandates are a central aspect of the reality which organizational decision makers must face." (1980:10) When our recommendations are not grounded in these aspects, and often they are not, it is not surprising that utilization is not forthcoming.

Third, let us discuss the goal-oriented model which many of us find convenient to use in outcome evaluations - measuring how closely a program came to meeting its goals. Etzioni (1960) has been widely quoted in the

evaluation literature for his advocacy of the system model for organizational analysis and his rejection of the goal model: "while devoting part of their means directly to goal activities, social units have to devote another part to other functions..." I have not seen any discussion of his methodological rationale for this stance: using the goal model, "the mistake committed is comparing objects that are not on the same level of analysis." Goals are norms, and as such are cultural entities - the ideal. When comparing a social system - the organization, the real - to a goal, the researcher must act as if the ideal were the real. How often do we critique researchers committing ecological fallacies - using one unit of analysis to "explain" something on another analytical level. Yet we are doing this with every outcome evaluation based on precise goal definition for its power. No wonder our results are sometimes looked upon as not reflective of what really happened, when "What is actually compared is a set of symbols on paper with a functioning social unit." (1960:259)

Fourth, system models help explain apparent low utilization. Etzioni's system model is intra-organizational:

> ...what counts is a balanced distribution of resources among the various organizational needs, not maximal satisfaction of any one activity, even of goal activities.

The open-systems approach goes beyond this to develop awareness of the "mutual permeation of an organization and its environment" (Emery and Trist, 1960:84). These views help to remind us as evaluators of our value to organizations since, as James Thompson (1967:13) states, the fact that organizations are part of an open system means that "the central problem for complex organizations is one of coping with uncertainty." Our information can reduce that uncertainty. The other side of the coin, however,

is that the information we can supply is only a small part of the many areas decision-makers need to consider when making a decision. Utilization of our information may be unrecognizable to us or our measuring instruments since it is integrated with other sources upon which the decision-maker can and must draw. Edwards, Guttentag and Snapper (1975) suggest that stakes as well as odds control decisions, and most evaluation research bears on the odds, not what is at stake.

I asked in the title of this section, are evaluators in irons? Sailors will recognize this term as one connoting being dead in the wind, unable to come about or make any progress. "Evaluation and organization," Wildavsky concludes, "...are to some extent contradictory terms." (1978:82) In their fettered condition, sailors sometimes choose to turn on their motors and go to a more comfortable position. On the other hand, they might use a technique called sculling. This involves working the boat's rudder back and forth for as long and as hard as necessary to change direction ever so slightly to again pick up the wind. Both reactions are adaptations to the situation one is in, but in the former the sailor has let the wind defeat him, whereas in the latter he has used the boat's natural tools and his own efforts to again make the wind work for him. I think evaluators have often adapted by letting the wind defeat them. I would urge that we adapt instead by utilizing our resources so that the wind is more likely, though not guaranteed, to work with us.

Give Administrators What they Want When they Want it: a Shared Definition?

Organizations are adaptive entities - adapting to and compromising with their external and internal environments. Organizational survival depends on it. Individuals, too, have survival needs. Scott Myers (1970)

discusses individual maintenance needs such as economic, social, and physical needs. Above and beyond maintenance needs are motivational needs: for achievement, for growth, for recognition. I think evaluators often stress the technical aspect of their role - their methodological and substantive expertise - in order to fulfill those needs. The technical role is, from the management perspective, what they were employed to do. As Broskowski, et.al. (1979:106) purport: "program evaluation is viewed as a primary management responsibility which is delegated to staff specialists only because of the technical training and time requirements." By accepting the management definition of the situation, evaluators are able to fulfill not only their economic needs, but other maintenance requirements as well. To satisfy their motivational needs as well requires not only accepting the technician role, but embracing it. The motivational need for mental growth can be met by focusing on improvement of methodology and statistical techniques, letting reduction of decision-makers' uncertainties take a back seat. The motivational needs for achievement and recognition can come from breakthroughs in analytical techniques as well as from a utilized interpretation of results.

Technical expertise is an important and necessary part of the evaluator's role. Giving administrators what they want when they want it is a part of what we do too. It is the overemphasis on, sometimes reification of, this aspect of the social scientist's role that makes me characterize it as letting the wind defeat us, as turning on the motor. It hinders our attempts to have impact on policy decisions. First, it makes the evaluator reactive in problem definition and management. The technician-evaluator's mind, when faced with a problem, is apt to be racing on to how

the analysis will be carried out rather than taking an active part in problem definition. Questions could tend to be geared toward clarification of the problem enough so that the evaluator understands it, and less toward aiding program people and management to phrase the problem as they understand and want it. It is akin to what March and Simon (1958) discuss for decision-makers, involving the "search" for the first "satisficing", not "optimal", solution. The range of relevant personnel consulted could thereby be narrowed, as the evaluator's questions may have been answered in a satisfactory manner without a wide search. But a study based on our understanding may not answer the real questions about which there are uncertainties.

Second, overemphasis on the technical role may make research design and methodology expressive rather than instrumental. The design and methodology can become ends in themselves - important in and of themselves - rather than serving the instrumental purpose of being means toward the eventual end of learning something about a program. When this is the case, it is easier for the evaluator to be subverted into providing legitimizing rather than de-mystifying reports. As Warren (1973:21) says, evaluation research "lends an aura of 'science' to the agency's efforts", its latent function being to support and legitimize the major outlines of agency programs even if negative findings are reported.

Evaluators as technicians alone can become "social accountants", generating reports upon request. While this can reduce management uncertainty, and thereby lead to utilization of the information, it is dependent upon the requestor having asked the right questions. Alternatively, evaluators as technicians alone can use information as a tool to exert power, insisting that they alone have the expertise to frame the question, design

the study, and make recommendations on the basis of their study. Egon Guba describes this type of technician as the "Ugly American"-like evaluator, and points to the likelihood of little impact because what we tell the client "often reflects our own biases and interests rather than the problems with which the client is actually beset." (1977:1, as quoted in Patton, 1978:289) While our technical expertise is a vital part of our role, to focus on it exclusively is to let ourselves be defeated by the wind. I believe there is a better way.

Evaluator as Scholar-Technician: An Alternative Definition

Deutscher (1976) asks us to distinguish between the "technician-employee" role and the "scholar-scientist" role. He is worried that, as scientists, we are "not free to serve as the unwitting tool of any political system," and this is a trap into which he fears the "technician-employee" could fall. I am advocating that evaluators consciously combine the two roles, defining themselves as scholar-technicians. That, I suggest, is like sculling: utilizing our own tools to let the wind work for us.

When I suggest that we add the scholar role to our technician stance, I am not advocating a return to the "pure research" focus. I am not advocating that we alone be the ones to decide what the problem is that we want to study. When I speak of the scholarly component of the evaluator's role, I am thinking of something far more abstract. Patton (1978:219) reminds us:

> Science is really nothing if it is not the application of critical intelligence to critical problems. The narrow parameters of the dominant paradigm have constrained that critical intelligence under the guise of attaining a natural science objectivity.

I think of C. Wright Mills' (1959) discussion of the "sociological imagination", admonishing my discipline to not only work as, but live as, sociologists. I think of Alvin Gouldner's (1970) exposition of "reflexive" sociology, reminding us that our interaction with others increases our awareness and knowledge. I think of Max Weber's Verstehen method of subjectively understanding a situation through empathy. I think of the ethnomethodologists' examination of things taken-for-granted - those implicit assumptions inherent in any program or organization we might study.

We are evaluators, and part of our role is "doing" evaluation research. We must, in addition to our scholarly input, be technicians carrying out the best evaluation research we are capable of doing. The scholarly component informs us in this process, so that in our technician role we are able to become "tools" - but not <u>of</u> the political system but <u>for</u> ourselves, and for our fellow participants in the organization.

That the scholarly component would be a valuable addition to the evaluator's role has been suggested in different forms for many years. Roland Warren (1973) urges a "depth diagnosis of the problem," and stresses the importance of "informed rational analysis." Krause and Howard (1973) speak of "the establishment and enactment of a 'symbiotic' relationship" with management, program staff and participants. Noblit and Radtke (1975) suggest "program ideology analysis" to identify and discuss with decision-makers "logical inconsistencies between stated and actual program goals, and between various program goals themselves." Stanley (1974) suggests we promote "program evaluation as a way of thinking...." Several authors suggest working with decision-makers and other relevant publics in thinking through to the consequences of an evaluation project -

by means of "decision theory" (Edwards, Guttentag and Snapper, 1975), "generating artificial data" (Harper and Babigian, 1971), or "negotiating a scenario" (Deutscher, 1977). Patton (1978) captures best what I have in mind, calling for an "active-reactive-adaptive" approach to utilization-focused evaluation. He would involve decision-makers and information-users in this active-reactive-adaptive process throughout the course of the evaluation.

> The evaluator actively solicits information about program contingencies, organizational dynamics, environmental uncertainties, and decisionmaker goals in order to focus the evaluation on questions of real interest to identified decisionmakers and information users to determine what useful information can be generated in the context of decisionmaker needs and program realities. (1978:139)

Decision-makers and information-users are identified and consulted throughout the process of the evaluation. The evaluator uses his or her critical intelligence, and draws others into the process, so that the result is something about which all feel an ownership.

Implementation: On Joining the Rat Race

As scholar-technicians, we utilize organizational theory to our advantage. We realize there is such a thing as an organizational collective will, and become a part of it. We realize that our communications are not automatically authoritative, and address them to organizational and individual purposes and constraints. We realize that goals are merely symbols, and try to operationalize their behavioral manifestations instead. We realize that we are only one input into a complex open system, and recognize that utilization of our information may be circuitous and recognizable to us only because we see changes in the organizational character.

I believe that internal evaluators are in a much better position to make the scholar-technician a viable role. External evaluators may approximate the internal evaluators' knowledge by such methods as the Delphi technique or decision-theoretic approaches. But these formalized procedures are time-consuming, not only for the evaluator but for organizational participants. One of the major groups of people we need to know about are managers, and studies of managerial behavior tell us that concentration on one activity, such as intensive goal-setting, is not the norm among managers. Managerial time is largely unscheduled and unpredictable. Most managerial activities are of short duration - under ten minutes. (See Sproull and Lackey, 1979) Only when the program we are evaluating is of major proportions and has multiple system ramifications are we likely to be able to extract a major time and energy commitment from managers. Rarely are the programs we evaluate considered to be that major within the organizational system. Internal evaluators can reserve the usage of these techniques for when the stakes are high, and their knowledge of the organization will allow them to carry out meaningful evaluations of less pivotal programs as well.

Internal evaluators are in a position to know the organizational character. They know who the decision-makers and information-users within the system are, and can address their perspectives. They are able to see in what ways the program , as implemented within the organization, has adapted to the organization's particularistic needs and concerns and therefore what aspects would not be generalizable to other organizations.

Internal evaluators, making use of informal mechanisms, know how the program was actually implemented. They can delve into the black box of

treatment and utilize that knowledge in the evaluation process. Informal mechanisms involve information sharing (see Pfeffer, 1978:41). Internal evaluators are not only in a position to receive information, but to share their own knowledge, facilitating cooperation rather than hostility toward evaluation efforts.

Summary

I began this paper by suggesting that we utilize our knowledge of organizations to examine our position as evaluators. In this brief space, I was only able to touch on some aspects of organizational theory that I felt had been ignored by the evaluation literature. I attempted to demonstrate that our reaction to our position may lead us to limit our role to that of technician, to satisfy our maintenance and motivational needs. I discussed the dangers of such a role definition, and suggested instead that we utilize our critical intelligence and define our role as that of scholar-technician. Utilization of our organizational knowledge was again suggested as the way in which to implement that role definition, and I posited that internal evaluators have the advantage. Underlying the entire discussion is the problem of our effectiveness in the evaluation role, and how to increase that effectiveness. I believe that the broadening of our role definition is one route to increase our effectiveness and value to the organization and its evaluation process. We will, at the very least, enhance our understanding of our organization - and recognize some causes for both effectiveness and ineffectiveness. Perhaps that is all we can ask.

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